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Reconsidering Children's Encounters With Nature and Place Using Posthumanism

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Abstract This article explores and reconsiders the view of children's encounters with place as central to a place-based pedagogy that seeks to dismantle rather than support constructions of a nature-culture binary. I unpack the current fervour for reinserting the child in nature and nature-based education as a significant phenomenon in environmental and outdoor education. I will draw on recent literature on place-based research and theorise using new materialist and posthumanist approaches that seek to disrupt anthropocentric views and support new ways of considering our encounters with the more-than-human world. Then, using these new approaches, I will theorise a recent place-based research project with children in the city of La Paz, Bolivia, to illustrate how it is possible to challenge current assumptions that are firmly entrenched in the child in nature movement. I will conclude by considering what intra-species relations, place encounters and child-body-animal-place relations can teach us about questioning anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism. Finally, I consider how can we overcome these limitations of a narrow and nostalgic view of 'child and nature' and reimagine a more diverse approach to education for a sustainable future.

A 'place' is known through the interrelations of animals with the environment (Massey, 2005). Research for many years on human-environment relationships have revealed a strong assertion that animals (human and nonhuman) get to 'know' a place through engagement and encounters with diverse environments. Lynch (1960, 1977), in his seminal work *Growing Up In Cities,* argued that adults' and children's knowledge of their urban environments correlated directly with their actual use and experience of place. But, due to an increasing degradation of urban environments, there has been a progressive view that we have denaturalised and dehumanised urban space, and in the process have made it difficult for children to have the freedom to engage with 'nature' in their everyday lives (Rissotto & Guiliani, 2006, p. 76). In Western societies there

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has been significant public debate about the impact on children of a loss of engagement with their local environments (Louv, 2005; Rissotto & Guiliani, 2006). It has been argued that a move away from children being active and visible in their community is the product of cultures of risk, fear, and litigation that have impacted on parents' willingness to allow children freedoms to be outside (Malone, 2007; Freeman & Tranter, 2012). Currently, the trend to keep children indoors or behind fences is in light of current childhood research that states by *not allowing* children to engage in independent mobility and environmental learning, teachers and parents are denying children opportunities to develop environmental literacy, risk assessment skills, and resilience. These are important skills that they will need to be safe and confident when managing the more complex environments urbanisation now presents (Gill, 2007; Malone, 2007). Challenging this growing trend, it has been purported that it is critical for the future of the planet to find ways to reconnect children with nature in order that they will develop the necessary skills to live more sustainably. In this article, using a case study of children living in La Paz, I have considered how thinking deeply about the way we construct children's relations with the world and, in particular, the everydayness of living in place, has consequences for how we frame nature, environmental and sustainability education. Ironically, unlike the story I have revealed in the introduction, children in La Paz are not separated from or invisible in their place. They, along with their dog companions, are the most visible animals in a difficult and harsh landscape. It is through a disruption of these grand narratives and their subsequent contradictions that I will expose the limitations of the anthropocentric views often informing educational debates around what are good practices in outdoor learning. In this article I extend a challenge to move outside the familiar and disrupt dominant ways of knowing the 'child in nature'.

New Nature Movement

In recent times, the 'children in nature' movement, the new nature movement, and nature/outdoor education have had a resurgence in public visibility. The resurgence has primarily been orchestrated around a fear that children are lacking opportunities to be connected to 'nature'. The consequence of advancing technology and urbanisation and changing 'childhoods' are often cited as the reason that previous generations had more freedom, more time, and more immersion in natural environments. With children's relationship to 'nature' being popularised through the child in nature movement, I believe it is an important time to consider which influential views of 'child' and 'nature' are informing research, particularly when these views are being underpinned by powerful anthropocentric views such as: '(1) human societies used to be closer to nature, (2) our current way of life is unnatural or distant from nature, and (3) proximity to nature is a question of teaching and learning' (Rautio, 2013a, p. 449). These sentiments support the perception that *humans are not nature* and it is possible for some species, namely humans, to be more or less nature, connected or disconnected from nature, and superior to or dominant over nature. Rather than continuing to reinforce these views, I am provoked to contemplate the possibilities that exist to challenge these enduring perceptions that position humans as exceptional. What new theoretical approaches, for instance, would be useful to deconstruct human/nature, object/subject binaries and promote more inclusive means of describing the nature-human collective, and to move away from cultural universalisms about the natured child?

Championing the 'child in nature' movement, Richard Louv, an American-based journalist, in his book *Last Child in the Woods* draws on a long history of work by prominent researchers in the field of children in nature (Carson, 1956; Chawla, 1994; Cobb, 1977;

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Kahn & Kellert, 2002; Orr, 1992, 2005; Sobel, 1996). The task of the new nature movement, according to Louv (2005, p. 3) is: '… a reunion of humans with the rest of nature as it use to be'. By being firmly focused on the past, what the new nature movement fails to do is consider a new imagining of children's encounters with the more than human world that is relevant for a contemporary inclusive and culturally diverse set of 21st-century childhoods. This is ironic, seeing it is called the *new nature movement,* and yet its focus is on reconstituting the past reincarnation of child in nature. Louv (2005, p. 9) defines nature as the 'the outdoors, anything that is natural — not human-made in the physical environment … when I use the word "nature" in a general way I mean natural wilderness, biodiversity, abundance — related loose parts in a backyard or a rugged mountains ridge. Most of all, nature is reflected in our capacity for wonder'. According to this definition, untainted or pure nature is ultimately the best type of nature for children. There is no direct reference to animals (domestic or wild) in his discussions, which assume animals, like humans, exist in relation to nature but are not nature, just as humans exist in relation to animals, but are not animals.

Dickinson (2013) is critical of the nostalgic view of 'children in nature' presented by the new nature movement literature, stating: 'Fall-recovery narratives can be problematic in how they reify the human-nature split, obscure environmental justice, influence irresponsible behavior, and normalize contemporary conditions and relationships' (p. 7). What she means by fall recovery narratives is a form of reminiscing where the past is always 'good' and 'virtuous'. It is a utopian world where children were safer, had more freedom, explored nature (particularly wild nature) without adult interference. This emphasis on romanticising past generations of childhood normalises the 'perfect' childhood and a 'perfect' parent who should be reconnecting their child to nature. If not, then they are viewed as deficit. For those who are reporting on and reprimanding these deficit parenting approaches, namely White, middle class Americans, the vast array of experiences of childhood in less developed nations or those in their own disadvantaged communities are essentially invisible. Research illustrates that not all childhood encounters with the 'natural world' are as restorative, healthy or spiritually uplifting as the new nature movement seems to suggest (Hordyk et al., 2014). Louv (2014) not only idealises his own White, male, middle class life in his very public blog entries, but also his own parents' 'idyllic parenting' approach. This naive view not only positions parents in a deficit for denying their children from having this restorative, nature-rich childhood, but it assumes that all parents experienced this idealised nature-rich childhood. Louv, in a recent blog on 'hummingbird parenting techniques', postulates this well when he wrote:

> *If we want our children or grandchildren to experience nature, we'll need to be more proactive than parents of past generations. When my wife and I raised our boys, we certainly felt the fear, and they didn't have the freedom to roam that we did. But our sons did experience nature — in the canyon behind our house, building their forts, digging their holes, sitting under a tree coated with butterflies, all within our eyesight. We took them hiking, and I took them fishing, often. And we tried to stay out of their way so they could explore on their own.* (Louv, 2014)

Dickinson (2013) supports my view here when she writes how the child-nature reconnect as conceptualised through the current child in nature movement is a '… white, middle class, male, heterosexual cultural past that obscures race, class and gender politics' (p. 7). By doing this 'nature education' so narrowly, these public commentators have created a blind spot to the realities of the majority of the world's children, who live in a diversity of 'childhoods'. This blinkered view also de-emphasises a long

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history of environmental degradation and disconnectedness, where being in 'nature' may not have been possible or positive for children. For some parents, their desires to keep children safe from the contaminants of the natural world may have meant they purposely limited children's movements (Malone, 2001). Hordyk et al. (2014), for example, reporting on their study of immigrant and refugee children in Canada, revealed that for children coming from developing nations: 'Nature was not a utopian ideal waiting to be experienced by children' and 'human and animal predators made walks in a forest dangerous past-times' (2014, p. 6). Dickinson (2013) argues that: 'Fall-recovery, then, is a subjective cultural creation in how it positions the *kind* of nature and childhood to which humans should return' (p. 7). Clarke and Mcphie (2014) also share similar concerns around how the child disconnect in the fields of outdoor and environmental education research is being situated. They wrote there is '… the impossibility of a "disconnection"' (p. 11). Quoting from the work of Tim Morton who wrote *Ecology without Nature,* they stated we cannot mourn for the loss of a connection to nature 'because we are so deeply attached to it — we are it'.

This article aims to disrupt the Cartesian divide between human and animals, and challenge the simplistic dichotomies of animal/human, nature/culture (Tipper, 2011) that often construct what has come to be 'viewed as nature', what is 'valued about nature', and what happens when children are 'placed "in nature"'. The article seeks to consider what happens if we take children outdoors to be with 'nature' and through an understanding that accounts for the complexities of culturally diverse 'childhoods'.

From this discussion on the challenges and tensions in the education movement, I have identified three key propositions that I believe limit the new nature movement and child in nature debate:

1. Children are viewed as outside of nature;
2. Nature is viewed and described as an inanimate object;
3. Childhood is idealised as white middle class America.

Child-Dog in La Paz

'This is my photograph of my dog,' says Fernando, aged 11 years, from Munaypata, as he hands me two photographs of the same dog sitting in the sun. 'My little dog, Regina is the only animal that I have, because she is my best friend and keeps me company when I am alone. We play in the forest together.' 'My dog's name is Black,' says Ricardo, aged 10, from Cotahuma. 'He is beautiful and every time I bath him he gets dirty again. He comes with me when I play with my friends.' Nora, aged 9, tells me, 'This photo is of my neighborhood and that is where my house is, it is big and I live with my dad my mum and my sister. My house has many rooms, my dog lives on the street and takes care of me a lot.'

Nora's photograph is taken from the roof of her house with her dog. While these comments from Fernando, Ricardo and Nora might seem quite mundane and everyday — bathing a dog, sitting on the house roof with your dog — they remind us of the everydayness and sameness of the places the child-dog shares.

The relationship of child-dog in the slums of La Paz creates a unique boundary around what it means to be in this 'place', the interconnected nature of humans and nonhuman is revealed, exposing a deep attachment to being 'nature'. 'Being with the world' is how Rautio (2013b) describes forming a different view of ourselves as human in relation to nonhumans: '…it is about realizing that the relation is always already there, and as much influenced by behaviour and existence of other co-existing species as it is by our intentional or unintentional actions' (p. 448).

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Through Rosario's images, the child photographer is situated with dogs, revealing the messy complex engagement of what it 'means to live as a child' in the place, La Paz. The photographs from Rosario present the story of child-dog thrown together in the communities of La Paz. The dogs are present and central to both photographs. In *Dogs in the Streets* there are a group of dogs in the middle of the road and the neighbourhood is empty, which can sometimes create a air of danger, but the dogs are playful and the child is taking photographs. It confirms the sentiment of the community space as occupied by child and dogs. In *On the Way to School,* the tail of a dog sticks out from the rubbish dump — I am drawn to the children in the distant. Is the child photographer with them or just following behind? The dog and child are connected through the lens, and the story the child is devising about the space confirms a focus on rubbish and garbage as central to co-merging child and dog lives. Miriam Giugni, in her study of the ethical dilemmas of child-chook cohabitation in an early childhood setting, does similar work to what I have tried to capture here (Taylor, Blaise, & Guigni, 2013). Her use of Haraway's concept of 'becoming worldy with' (Haraway, 2003, 2008) could provide further possibilities for reading these tricky contributions animals make as material agents cohabiting with children. While this analysis work was retrospective and the intention was not to ask children to consider the relationship through their images, it is the spontaneous accounts of child-dog-place that drew me in to their stories and depictions. (See Figure 1.)

'This is my house, it is on an incline,' says Juan, aged 11, from Cotahuma. 'It is peaceful where I live, there is not much noise, and we can see a street dog called Max, but we don't have any food for him. My dog, which is what I like most, is not in my home. There are lots of street dogs. I don't like the dogs breaking things, everything gets dirty, there are many dogs. My mum and Max are important to me.' (See Figure 2.)

Diego, aged 12, from Cotahuma, had taken a number of photographs of the stray street dogs (see Figure 3) that often accompanied him as he also walked around the streets. He handed me one where I could see a dog high up on a roof alone, looking down. Diego explained: 'This photograph is of a dog that I take care of because it doesn't eat. The dogs are badly treated and the people beat them for no reason [pause] a bit like the children [he giggles as he looks at his photograph] sometimes we hide on the rooftops to be off the streets with the dogs.' The other photograph? 'That is the dog that sometimes gets beaten, the streets are dangerous.'

The street dogs are urban scavengers, not Western-style, house-dwelling, middle class 'family pets'; and children spend long periods of unsupervised time on the streets with the dogs, where the dogs live; they coexist as dog-child, as a unique body, as a street collective entity. Many children look after or feed street animals and told me they felt distressed when dogs and children were treated badly by local adults or strangers in the neighbourhood. Throughout my materialist reading of child and dog encounters in La Paz, children seem to explore what Tipper (2011) calls 'the tactile and embodied reality of knowing animals' (p. 153), the fleshy detail of the physicality of the relationships.

Describing his relationship with Coco, Juan stated:

> *Coco was my best friend. He was near me, always he was near me. He hear me, he was always with me. He understand the things I want. He always comes with me into the forest to play. He is my play mate. He was the same as a human friend, it was no difference between us as friends.*

Juan's photographs (see Figure 4) show child and dog on a journey far from neighbourhood streets and into the upper reaches of the nearby valley. The land is steep, and due to landslides and floods, dangerous. Rubbish is often dumped here, too, and one photograph depicts a large dumping area for household rubbish on the way to the top of

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(a)



(b)

FIGURE 1: (Colour online) (a) Dogs in the streets; (b) On the way to school. Photographs taken by Rosario, aged 12, Munaypata.

the valley. In one photograph we can see Coco the dog rummaging around among the rubbish looking for food. The second photograph, taken where Juan and Coco play in the natural environment, reminds us — as with the first photograph — of the less than ideal play spaces where child-dog encounters are located. Through the description of the friendship between Juan and his dog, we sense the intimacy and companionship both child and dog support. The 'unromantic' child-dog relations experienced by impoverished urban-dwelling children and dogs in La Paz contradicts a utopian dream of a past idealised childhood.

Messy Methodologies

In this study of child-dog, intra-species relations I have retrospectively adopted a post-humanistic approach and used ideas emanating from the writings of new materialism; in particular, employing and trying on the concept of intra-action. The appeal of adopting the conceptual tool of 'intra-action' was in the ability it afforded me to view

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FIGURE 2: (Colour online) (a) Max the street dog; (b) Most important Mum and Max. Photographs taken by Juan, aged 11, Cotahuma.

intra-species encounters as vibrant, in which the human and nonhuman objects were actors shaping and being shaped by these vibrant encounters. Rautio (2013b) explains the distinction between more common ways of thinking about *interaction* and use of *intra-action* when theorising in this way:

> *In interaction independent entities are viewed as taking turns in affecting each other, these entities are taken to each have an independent existence. In intra-action, interdependent entities are taken to co-emerge through simultaneous activity to come into being as certain kind of entity because of their encounter. (p. 2)*

These approaches allowed me to imagine a view of agency not tied exclusively to humans. Nonhuman entities became more than simply *objects* being directed by humans, but as *subjects* in there own right, they were shaping an exchange and co-merging with children.

The research study was conducted in partnership with UNICEF Bolivia and La Paz municipal council and was carried out in three slum communities in the greater metropolitan area of La Paz. The research engaged with 80 children aged from 6 to 14 years using participatory research, a methodology that supports an authentic engagement with children to express their views as autonomous agents (Malone, 2006; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014). This approach sought to appreciate the child's world as constituted through encounters with their material surroundings (Malone, 2006). With

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(a)



(b)

FIGURE 3: (Colour online) (a) Roof a safe place to hide; (b) Dangers of being on the streets. Photographs by Diego, aged 12, Cotahuma.

participatory place-based research methodologies, children are engaged as co-researchers; that is, they have the opportunity to be involved in all stages of the study design (Malone, 2006). This participatory place-based research methodology promotes children as a catalyst for documenting the encountering of being in a place and knowing it well. Children were engaged in visual, oral, and mobile research methods, including drawings of their place and dream places, photography and photovoice storytelling, guided tours, and walking interviews. In this article, I focused only on the data collected by children using photography. At the beginning of the study, children were provided with disposable cameras and over a week they were asked to take images of their everyday lives. Children were given no specific instructions on the photographic content. Once the film was developed, children were then asked to discuss the content of the photographs; it was in these conversations of child-dog place that I came to know the intimacy of the child-dog relations. Through the children, often with dog beside me, I encountered the embodiment of a complex worldly knowing of human and nonhuman becomings.

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(a)



(b)

FIGURE 4: (Colour online) (a) Dumped rubbish; (b) Steep valley areas for play. Photographs taken by Juan, aged 13, Cotahuma.

The 'space in between children and their environments' is the way Rautio (2013a, p. 4) describes noticing through intra-action the shaping of the data of the objects, the things of our research studies. The photographs by the children revealed a powerful set of images of child/nature in place encounters. The child holding the camera, I found, provided the perfect stance for an image of the 'objects' of their gaze (dogs, mountains, trees, streets), highlighted as encounters of orbiting subjects. Even though the intention of the photography was to encourage the child to represent themselves, dogs were more prominent than children. It was through this in-between space of child-dog relations that intimate layers of the complexity of life in La Paz were exposed to me and from this my desire to consider how I could theorise this relationship more deeply and acknowledge its many complexities.

When theorising these child-animal encounters in La Paz, I considered the importance of what Rautio (2013a) calls 'messy methodologies': data that does not fit neatly into categories with certainty and closure; rather, it is research where the 'complexity

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and open-endedness of phenomena' (p. 403) are not sacrificed. By engaging in a messy methodology and with an analysis focused on de-centring the human, the dog is not included as merely an 'object' within the stories of children's cultures of play or a subject of the photographic gaze, but is in a vibrant dance of materiality with the child's body.

Child-Dog Interspecies Relations

La Paz is a city with around 500,000 dogs that mostly living in the slum communities, and the dogs experience freedom in these communities. This freedom could be understood as an ancient and respectful alliance: dogs are free to do as they please as long as they do not get in the way. Humans may or may not own them and everyone has the right to beat and kill them if they are sick or cause harm. Dogs are neither pets, strays, or wild; they are left to scavenge for themselves, loosely connected to families, coming and going, sometimes wandering into yards, but mainly hanging around on the streets. Once a year, the city holds a national dog day when the street dogs are rounded up and fed as much food at they can eat, and they are bathed and big ribbons placed around their necks.

'Animals are a compelling part of the human experience of the natural world' (Myers & Saunders, 2012, p. 153); they are responsive to actions and often provide special connections between humans and nonhuman that is dynamic and interactive. Haraway (2003), in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, argues that co-evolution should be defined in broader terms than a visible morphological transformation of species. She argues that to describe adaptive transformations in dog species, for example, as a *biological* response to human communities, and transformations in human species as a *cultural* or purely inter-human development, is a mistake. 'At the least,' she writes, 'I suspect that human genomes contain a considerable molecular record of the pathogens of their companion species, including dogs' (p. 31).

La Paz is a city of around 2 million people; just under half of these are children. Large numbers of these children live in poverty. Children in La Paz only go to school for three hours in the morning and afterwards they make their way back into the neighborhoods that are essentially empty. It is a gendered space: in the afternoon young girls are mostly inside tending to domestic chores and caring for younger siblings, while the boys are free to do as they please. The biggest threat for children is kidnapping, domestic violence, pollution, and the degraded landscape.

In working with and through my data on the children and dogs of La Paz, I was enacting 'intra-action' as used within new materialism as a strategy to help to document the messy, heterogeneous relations between child and animal (Barad, 2007; Rautio, 2013a, 2013b). Intra-actions acknowledge that object and subject are mutually constituted and are only relationally distinct; they do not exist as separate individual elements. A new materialist ontology therefore provided me with the tools to consider 'a conception of agency not tied to human action, shifting the focus for social inquiry from an approach predicated upon humans and their bodies, examining instead how relational networks or assemblages of animate and inanimate affect and are affected' (Fox & Alldred, 2014, p. 1). Therefore, the child body becomes more than a 'naturalised child', as in the reconnected child in Louv's imaginary stories, but they are the product of the assemblages, associations and relationships through which humans are connected to the more than human world in diverse and complex ways. What I am endeavouring to do with this approach is to decentre the human in the animal-child relationship by viewing interspecies encounters as 'social' and 'ecological'. A feature of this ontological perspective is that it 'shifts from conceptions of objects and bodies as occupying distinct and

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delimited spaces, and instead sees human bodies and all other material, social and abstract entities as relational' and that these '… assemblages of relations develop in unpredictable ways' (Fox & Alldred, 2014, p. 3).

Rather than thinking through the child's relations to dogs (nature) by elevating dogs to the status of the children, or de-elevating the child to the status of dog, a posthumanist reading of the child-dog in La Paz seeks to unpack political, ethical, and ontological questions without enforcing a traditional human-animal distinction. By shifting away from the *child* in nature as the only agential body and focusing on the materiality of child bodies and the bodies of other nonhuman entities as relational, it has allowed me to consider new imaginings for child-dog encounters: encounters that were connected to a deep sense of intra-species interdependence as children and dogs co-shape and co-emerge in shared places. Children and dogs in a place of cohabitation become deeply embedded in the ecology of my posthumanist meaning making. That is, by reimagining through a materialist fashion the nuances of interspecies relations, I paused to notice 'the intricate web of interrelations that mark the contemporary subjects' relationship to their multiple ecologies, the natural, the social, the physic' (Bradiotti, 2013, p. 98).

In the past, Uzzell (1988) has argued that in relation to children and their village or neighbourhood environment, there is a benefit in considering the idea of territoriality and attachment when describing a child's place encounters. This concept of territoriality is intimately related to how humans and nonhumans come to the environment, how they organise themselves in relation to place, and how they come to give meaning through attachment to a place. From this study, I imagined dog-child bodies being attached to a place and being allowed to have a greater identification and feelings of connectedness through newly imagined body-mind-place relations. Emplacement is likely to lead children to feel able to influence their environment, to embed themselves within it, to form a place/body identity. In place-based research the relationship between places to which one is attached can be varied: it may be 'a safe haven where one can retreat from threats, problem-solving, and gain emotional relief' (Scannell & Gifford, 2014, p. 26), or an 'exploratory place to allow a sense of freedom, control and self-sufficiency' (Derr, 2006, p. 119), or an imaginary place to create, dream and sense. The photographs revealed children with dogs retreated to 'special places' in the neighbourhood in order to create those opportunities for sensorial and tactile relations: the sun on their faces, the allure of the snow-capped mountains, the birds singing, the smell of the rubbish, the fear of strangers. Through the photographs and stories, children exposed their attachments to the real and imagined spaces they coinhabited with dogs as they share the experiences of the landscape, the fear of being unsafe or abducted, mistreated or exposed to environmental dangers. Noticing and attending to the embodiment of place-based qualities through the child-dog encounters provides an opportunity for considering a *child-nature* collective deeply embedded in place, 'to open up a new form of political enquiry which attends to the interconnectedness of the human and the more-than-human-world' (Taylor, 2011, p. 432). There is the possibility that a focus on 'place' rather than 'nature' provides an opportunity for rethinking the position of humans as exceptional and outside of nature, although I heed the warning by Clarke and Mcphie (2014, p. 14) that 'we should look to be cautious of the language we use to depict the world', even when supplanting dominant narratives of inequality and colonisation as I have done in this work.

Conclusions

Through theories of posthumanism and retrospectively applying these to my research data I have sought to challenge a view of human culture that is positioned as separate

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and superior to a nonhuman domain called 'nature'. In these communities high in the valleys of La Paz, I found that child-dog interspecies relations were a unique entity, not seen in other human or nonhuman relations. Exploring the ideas of interspecies relations through child-dog encounters provided possibilities for considering how child-dog caring, being with and being shaped by 'children and dogs' may be extended to further species, ecosystem and planetary relations. While these ideas are not new (Myers & Saunders, 2002), providing the spaces for interrogating further child/body/species/place relations as assemblages, associations and relationships could be useful when considering the complexity of core concepts in sustainability education, such as interdependency and multiple ecologies. By interrogating these child-dog encounters in La Paz differently, I deliberately sought to notice and attend to questions of the child-animal relationship, with the view that it could contribute to a reconsideration of intra-species relations and questions of the 'human-centric', 'Western-centric', and 'class-centric' universalisms of dominant voices in the new nature movement. As an alternative to a romanticised child-nature relationship, by drawing on new materialism and posthumanism, I have considered the 'potential to contest the arrogance of anthropocentrism and the exceptionalism of the humans' (Braidotti, 2013, p. 66) found in the child in nature debates. I found a space for supporting a process for redefining one's sense of attachment and connection to a shared world or for reinscribing place as having 'multiple ecologies of belonging' through intraspecies cohabitation. By bridging the nature-culture divide, by rejecting moral, cultural and classist universalisms, the study considered what an embodied 'child-nature' collective in 'place' could look like. Beyond the idea of applying these approaches to inform new ideas for reimagining sustainability and place, I also set myself the task in this article to explore if by using theories of posthumanism and new materialism, I could expose the limitations of three key propositions that are framing current debates in the child in nature movement. That is, by using these approaches I sought to disrupt universalisms in current debates around nature education, environmental or sustainability education by opening up new possibilities for situating and 'recognizing the entanglement of human and more than human relations' (Taylor, 2013, p. 118). In concluding, I will now revisit the three propositions:

1. *Children are Viewed as Outside of Nature*

First, by illuminating children's encounters of dogs in La Paz as a 'collective encounter', it could be possible to further extend Taylor's (2011, 2013) 'common worlds' concept and advance an indivisible human and nonhuman real-world collective to inform the child in nature movement. That is, rather than a child engaging with nature (out there), it could be helpful to adopt the view 'natureculture collective are largely integral to and already constitute children's worldy lives' (Taylor, 2013, p. 119).

2. *Nature is Viewed and Described as an Inanimate Object*

Drawing on theories of new materialism and 'vibrant' matter, all objects or 'things' within the study are viewed as animated. Dogs, earth, houses, neighbourhoods, and trees are awarded the same agency as humans. The child-dog-place encounter in La Paz provides an example of an animated reciprocal exchange between animate objects, that is, matter moving matter within 'place'.

3. *Childhood is Idealised as White Middle Class America*

The children's accounts of interspecies companionship and survival in La Paz challenge Western middle class sensibilities of an idealised child-nature encounter. Encounters in the new nature movement are often recalled nostalgically and with little reference to the diversity of 'childhoods' experienced by children in the 21st century. They provide a very

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exclusive and narrow view of relationships between childhood, children and nature. Through posthumanist theorising of child-dog relations in La Paz, I have provided a counter-narrative to the privileged, romantic notions of cherished child-nature relations and a more equitable representation of diversely natured and encountered childhoods.

By challenging anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism in the new nature movement, I am seeking to consider how disorderly and diverse child/nature/body/place relations could be central for reimagining. Rather than nature, environmental and sustainability education looking to the past, it is time to consider what contemporary theories can contribute to innovative educational practices for a more sustainable future.

Keywords: nature education, sustainability education, posthumanism, new materialisms, place-based participatory research, new nature movement, interspecies relations

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